



Letters

At last! We can bring you the definitive answer to the Tiscali disc removal conundrum, thereby allowing thousands of *Shopper* readers to enjoy the rest of the magazine without further incident – we hope

COLOUR CODED



STAR LETTER

I am writing to complain about an annoying problem with your magazine. You're probably thinking this is just a stupid little thing that a teenage boy (me) notices because he's got way too

much free time, but anyway, the problem is that the colour of your magazines' spines do not have any order to them. They go from red to white, then white to blue and so on. And there was no issue number on the last one.

Unlike a person who moans about Tiscali discs sticking to pages, which is annoying, I will not threaten you (if you can call it that) with a comment such as, "I have reluctantly made the decision that if I have this problem again next month, I am going to cancel my regular order for your magazine at my newsagent." This is rather stupid considering you can just read the article and then remove the disc. I hope that you enjoyed this letter's pointlessness, even though the chances are that you'll just glance at it and put it in the shredder.

Michael Skuse

It's a fair cop, Michael. We did forget to include the number of the July 2005 issue on its spine and we're very sorry. As some small gesture towards keeping your collection of *Shoppers* consistent, we've included a cut-out number for you to glue to your copy. You

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can bet we'll be doing the same thing here too, or maybe using a biro.

As for the different colours of the spines, we asked Colin the art editor about their apparently random order but he just winked, tapped his nose a couple of times and chuckled conspiratorially. The truth is out there.

ASSAULT OF BATTERIES

I'd like to pick up on Denis Treadgold's letter in *Shopper* July 2005 regarding rechargeable batteries. As you rightly state, it is most probable that the charger is overcharging the cells, which will shorten their life faster than anything. This is a typical fault with your average charger, and I've often thought it to be a ploy used by manufacturers to destroy the cells prematurely, making you buy some sooner than necessary, but maybe I'm cynical.

However, there is one other factor you did not mention. Rechargeable cells have a nominal voltage of 1.2V as opposed to 1.5V for dry cells. If the camera uses four of these cells, as would be typical, this means the voltage supplied by a rechargeable pack will be 4.8V instead of the 6V that would be supplied by dry cells.

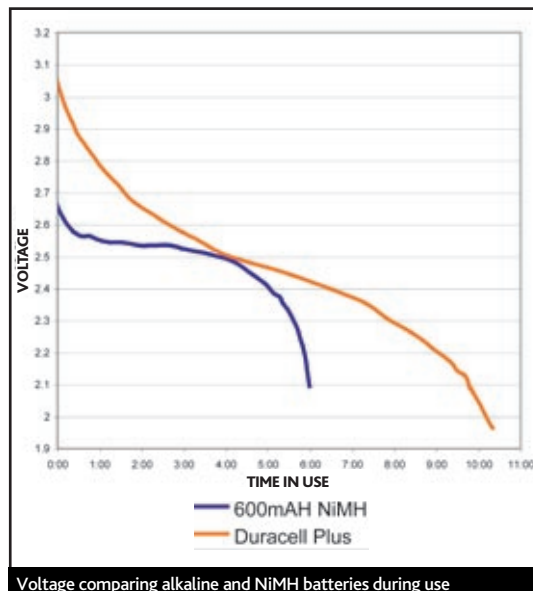
The camera will most likely monitor the voltage and, when it drops below a certain level, shut down. If the camera is designed to use dry

cells, this cut-off voltage may well be as high as 4.5V, so you can see that the rechargeable cells only need to suffer a very small drop before the camera classes them as discharged, even though they still have plenty of capacity.

To make things worse, at this stage they may still have a 75 per cent charge, so when you recharge them in your average charger they will be overcharged for a lot longer than if they had been properly discharged, resulting in them being destroyed even sooner.

Phil Beed

You're right that rechargeable batteries don't provide the same high levels of voltage as alkaline batteries. We've run drain tests on both types of battery and charted the voltage here. These tests were done using two AAA cells in an MP3 player, so the actual lifetimes shown aren't representative for digital camera users, who will use AA batteries. AA rechargeable batteries perform far more efficiently than the smaller AAA rechargeables. However, the graph below gives a general indication



Voltage comparing alkaline and NiMH batteries during use

as to how the voltage of alkaline batteries declines over time, compared to NiMH batteries.

It's interesting that the voltage of rechargeable batteries doesn't decline in a steady fashion. It shelves out, providing a stable voltage for a while, before dropping off fast at the end. So, though it's true that your camera will stop working if rechargeable batteries suffer just a small voltage drop, this voltage drop is only likely to occur after a prolonged stable-out period. Only if the camera rejects the batteries before they reach their stable voltage will significant amounts of charge be left unused.

DEARTH OF DVD DETAILS

I wanted to buy a DVD writer and followed your Best Buy recommendation in *What's New*, *Shopper* June 2005. I checked the full specification on Dabs' website and on LG's website and ordered the drive.

When it arrived, I was amazed to discover that it specified a minimum processor of 2.4GHz Pentium 4 or higher in the system requirements. Since my computer only has an Intel Celeron 1.7GHz I was rather annoyed that

WRITE IN – AND WIN!

The writer of this month's star letter will receive an HD182 Photo Hard Disk from the ATMT Group & Argosy Research Inc, which has been researching and developing IT-based technology products since 1987. The 20GB HD182 has a 9-in-1 memory card reader and allows you to copy directly from flash memory to the hard disk without needing a PC. What's more, it's so compact that it will fit in the palm of your hand so you can take it with you wherever you go.

STAR PRIZE
WORTH £130!



PLUS! Every letter-writer also receives a fantastic *Shopper* mug!



this fact was not included in the drive specification by Dabs or LG.

To add insult to injury, the DVD writers on test in *Labs, Shopper* July 2005 doesn't mention minimum system requirements for any of the drives tested.

Hugh Clark

☹ Any DVD writer should work in any reasonably modern PC, including yours. They might not be able to burn data at their top-rated speed, but they should come close. The most likely reason that the box listed a 2.4GHz Pentium 4 is because the drive comes with some DVD-authoring software, which needs lots of processing power if you want to capture and convert live video into a digital file.

We could list every system requirement for every utility that comes with a piece of hardware, but this wouldn't be as useful as it sounds because hardware requirements incorporate a great deal of guesswork. The best you can do is apply a few rules according to what you want your PC to do. For example, if you want to edit video you should consider investing in a 2GHz or faster processor. That said, your 1.7GHz Celeron should be able to manage simple video-editing projects and is probably capable of running the software that came with the LG drive – just not at its best.

AN OFFER YOU CAN'T REFUSE

You got me. In the Cover Gift Guide, *Shopper* June 2005 there is a mouth-watering offer for *Computer Shopper* readers – they can save £20 off the list price of PagePlus 10, which normally costs £100. This sounds like a good deal to me. But *What's New* mentions yet another offer; it only costs £50 to upgrade to PagePlus 10 from any other Serif product.

Am I to understand that we can register PagePlus 7.06 free with Serif and then upgrade for just £50, or do we fork out another £30 on top to take advantage of your £80 special offer? Hywel Jones

☹ You need to buy a Serif product to take advantage of the £50 offer. Serif told us that you need to own a Serif product – one that you've actually bought – to qualify for the £50 upgrade to PagePlus 10. Our PagePlus 7.06 cover disc doesn't count. *Shopper* readers who don't already own a Serif product are still eligible for the £20 discount which, as you say, is a good deal.

Alternatively, and you didn't hear it from us, you could try to buy a Serif product for less than £30. This will qualify you for the £50 upgrade and you will end up spending less than £80. Amazon (www.amazon.co.uk) lists a few ancient Serif products that cost less than a fiver. Buy one, contact Serif and you could end up paying a total of £55 and receiving a product worth £100. Just don't tell anyone where you got this tip.

THIS ASDA BE BETTER

'Print Your Digital Photos', *Shopper* June 2005 states that Jessops offers the best digital printing deal, with 10 6x4" prints costing £2.50 using the one-hour service. This is not the best deal.

I thought your readers ought to know that Asda does a better deal, with the prices as follows. It costs 15p each for between one and 49 6x4" prints; 50 or more prints are then 10p each, so 10 prints cost £1.50.

Prints at 7x5" are 20p each for between one and 49 prints; 50 or more prints are then 15p each. And 9x6" prints cost 25p each for between 1 and 49 prints, while 50 or more prints are 20p each. Prices are based on the one-hour service.

Kevin Parks

☹ Nice one Kevin, thanks for that. We haven't managed to discover which printing system Asda uses yet, so we can't comment on the quality of its prints, but when we find out we'll let you know.

Asda has openly criticised its competitors for charging too much for making digital prints. In 2003 it slated Jessops and Boots for charging "shocking prices", and for charging more to develop digital prints than for processing film. Providing digital services costs the retailer less than developing and printing from film.

WATT A TURN-OFF

My computer activity averages a couple of hours a day for four or five evenings a week, using dial-up pay-as-you-go internet access. It has been my practice to switch the computer on only when I want to use it, and turn it off after each session.

However, I recall reading somewhere that the computer is better left switched on all the time, as PCs do not take kindly to the on-off treatment. Should I leave it on all the time, or switch it off when it's not in use?

Brian Hillier

☹ The old leaving-PCs-on-or-not argument has been bouncing around the technical pages of computer magazines for years. Our view is that, unless you find yourself dipping in to use your PC on a frequent but irregular basis, you should turn off the PC when it's not being used. We only bother to do this once per day, so it goes on in the morning and is turned off when we finish work. As you only use yours for a couple of hours a day, a few days a week, you ought to turn off your PC after every session and save some electricity.

However, if you want to have your PC running all the time you won't find your power bill going through the roof, particularly if you're not leaving a CRT monitor burning through the night. If you're the sort who leaves the lights on in every room then you're wasting far more power there than you would by leaving your computer running.

We know of no evidence that suggests you can extend the life of your PC's components by leaving it on, or by turning it off. We've read half-baked theories that observe such things as, "Light bulbs only blow when you turn them on." This implies that leaving your PC on will bestow it with immortality, which is wrong.

Servers are designed to run 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and a desktop PC will cope with this treatment too, at least for a while. But we've also had always-on desktop PCs break down after a year or so when their processor fans died. This rare occurrence might not have happened if the computers weren't sucking up dust all the time.

TISCALI DISCS. AGAIN

I have just read your least-ever customer-focused response in *Letters, Shopper* July 2005. I fully concur with DC Laurie's complaint about the Tiscali disc being glued to its advertisement page. It has annoyed me intensely. However, rather than see the obvious solution, which is to leave ☹

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The Editor is always pleased to receive ideas for articles, preferably sent first in outline form, with details of the author's background and, where available, samples of previously published work. We cannot, however, accept responsibility for unsolicited copy and it may take time for us to reply.

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the disc loose in the magazine or attached with the cover discs, your respondent advised how to remove the bloody disc. We don't want to have to remove the disc, we don't want it stuck to the page in the first place.

Unlike DC Laurie, I don't have a regular order with my newsagent. I subscribe to *Shopper* and my subscription will not be renewed unless you cease this pointless hassle for your readers. Remember, without readers you will not be able to attract advertisers. Get your act together, listen to your readers, give customer service and leave the pages free of anything that may cause damage as it is removed.

Joe Smith

☹ We're sorry you didn't enjoy our light-hearted response to DC Laurie. This month we've gone straight to the top and asked *Computer Shopper's* publisher, John Garewal, to justify the annoying Tiscali CD adverts. He said, "Everyone would like the magazine to be advert-free. Unfortunately, without ads such as the Tiscali CD, the magazine would cost far too much for readers to buy." Luckily, resourceful *Shopper* readers have sent in more ideas about how to keep your copy of the magazine in one piece.

AND AGAIN

I was reading *Letters, Shopper* July 2005 and the letter titled 'That's Torn It' really bemused me. Not so much the letter as the reply. No-one mentions the obvious anymore. I have been reading *Computer Shopper* for about 18 months now and I believe I've cracked it and discovered a 100 per cent foolproof way to solve the problem for all but the most anal reader. Follow these simple instructions and you can't go wrong.

Upon delivery, open the plastic with fingers. Put the cover disc to one side, grab a corner of the magazine and give a small shake over your

bin to relieve the mag of any annoying loose adverts. Next, locate the page with the Tiscali CD on it, and *before* (I stress 'before' as this is the crux of the matter), *before* you tear the CD out, turn the page over and read the other side. Then *after* (I stress 'after' for the same reason), *after* you have read the other side, rip the CD out with as much hate and vigour as you can muster. This is satisfying and has never failed to provide me with complete coverage of the magazine.

I would have thought that in a magazine so heavy with procedural walkthroughs you would have suggested such an option, as opposed to teasing Mr DC Laurie with removal methods he will have frustratingly tried already.

Gary Williams

☹ Thanks for the walkthrough idea, Gary. We were going to do one, but Samuel beat us to it (please see below).

CORRECTION

An error was made in the £599 Budget PC Labs test in *Shopper* June 2005. The Mesh Matrix Vector Blast was incorrectly reported as having a two-year onsite and third-year return to base warranty. The actual warranty supplied by Mesh on this system is one-year onsite, with second and third years return to base.

Overall, the warranty is still the best on offer in the group, and the total period of cover remains unchanged. Therefore the Best Budget Buy award and the system's rating still stand.

The mistake was due to a transcription error when transferring all six system's details to a single spreadsheet. We have changed our methods and now recheck all details against the original specification sheets sent by manufacturers. We apologise wholeheartedly to any readers affected by this error. ☹

HOW TO...

Uninstall the Tiscali Disc subsystem from your *Computer Shopper* magazine

Sick of tearing pieces out of Helpfile? Samuel Howgego shows you how to get rid of the Tiscali CD



Following the publishing of the Nixon Bath Method for Tiscali Disc detachment (*Letters, Shopper* June 2005), further study of the problem has revealed an alternative, dry solution for this particularly troublesome task. The method is as follows:

1 Adopt a comfortable reading position with the *Computer Shopper* magazine positioned on the user's lap.

2 Starting at the front of the magazine, begin a sequential perusal of each section and article in turn.

3 When you reach the point where the disc begins to interfere with your page-turning function, turn to the page holding the disc.

4 You will find that the body heat transferred from your lap during the reading process has loosened the disc, allowing it to be removed with just a little care.